

Cornerstone Systematic Theology: Theology Proper The Trinity 11/23/25

1. The Doctrine of the Trinity (pp. 189-210)¹
 - a. Introduction
 - i. God is Triune – Tri – meaning 3, and -une, meaning a unity; one
 - b. Biblical proof
 - i. The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament
 1. “Elohim” (the Hebrew word for “God”) is a plural noun (Gen 1:26)
 2. Plural pronoun used of God
 - Genesis 1:26 “Let us make man in our image.”
 - Genesis 3:22 Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”
 - Genesis 11:7 “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”
 - Isaiah 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”
 3. God’s name applied to more than one person in same text
 - Psalm 110:1 The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”
 4. 3 Persons are intimated in certain texts

¹ Notes created with assistance from the Master’s Seminary Theology I notes (TH 605) & *Biblical Doctrine*, eds. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue.

- Isaiah 48:16 “Come near to Me, listen to this: from the first I have not spoken in secret, from the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.”
- Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners

5. The Angel of the Lord implies plurality in the Godhead

- Genesis 22:15–16 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son”

6. The Messiah is said to be God

- Isaiah 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Strong: “While they [the OT intimations] do not by themselves furnish a sufficient basis for the doctrine of the trinity, they contain the germ of it, and may be used in confirmation of it when its truth is substantially proved from the New Testament.”

ii. The Doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament

1. Direct (formulaic) references to the Trinity in the New Testament

(1) The baptismal formula

Matthew 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”

(2) The apostolic benediction

2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

(3) Jesus' baptism

Matthew 3:17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

2. Indirect references to the Trinity in the New Testament

Romans 15:16 to be a minister of **Christ Jesus** to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of **God**, so that [my] offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the **Holy Spirit**.

Romans 15:30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our **Lord Jesus Christ** and by the love of the **Spirit**, to strive together with me in your prayers to **God** for me

2 Corinthians 1:21 Now He who establishes us with you in **Christ** and anointed us is **God**, 22 who also sealed us and gave [us] the **Spirit** in our hearts as a pledge.

Ephesians 2:18 for through **Him** we both have our access in one **Spirit** to the **Father**.

The Gospel of John

- "Indeed, the fourth gospel is in parts virtually a trinitarian tract" (Bray, 148).
- "The fourth gospel is undoubtedly the main biblical source for trinitarian doctrine. . ." (149)

John 14:15-16 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever"

John 16:13-15 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. All

things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you."

c. The Tri-Unity of God / Formulating the Doctrine of the Trinity

- i. Definition: There is one essence in the Godhead and this one essence wholly and equally permeates each of the three persons in the Godhead without division or multiplication (Andy Snider).

The whole essence of God is in each trinitarian Person.

- W.G.T. Shedd: "the divine essence can subsist wholly and indivisibly in more persons than one."
- John Owen: "In one essence there can be but one person, when the essence is finite and limited, but not when the essence is unlimited."
- The essence is neither prior nor subsequent to the Persons (Example: this does NOT say that it's like a bucket of water, from which some become the 3 states of water-solid, liquid, vapor)

ii. Biblical teaching

1. Each of the 3 Persons is God

The Father is God

- John 6:27 "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

The Son is God

- John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- Hebrew 1:8 But of the Son [He says], "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom."

The Holy Spirit is God

- 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you?

2. The 3 Persons are one God

The Father and the Son are One

- John 10:30-33 “I and the Father are one.” The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out [to be] God.”

The Father and the Spirit are One

- 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you?

The Son and the Spirit are One

- Romans 8:9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are One

John 14:16, 18, 23 “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever...”¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...”²³ Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.

d. Explanation of the Doctrine

We have observed:

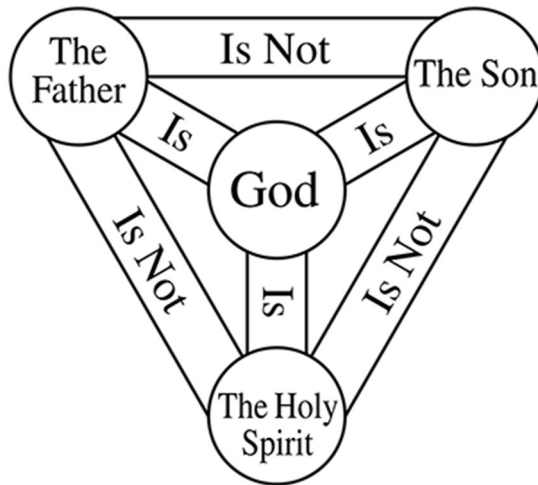
- i. There is only one God. He consists of one indivisible/simple essence. His essence is indivisible.
- ii. The one God exists eternally as three distinct persons, or subsistences.

John Calvin: By person, then, I mean a subsistence in the Divine essence, — a subsistence which, while related to the other two, is

distinguished from them by incommunicable properties. By subsistence we wish something else to be understood than essence. For if the Word were God simply and had not some property peculiar to himself, John could not have said correctly that he had always been with God... But whenever the Father is compared with the Son, the peculiar property of each distinguishes the one from the other (Institutes 1.6.13).

- iii. Each person of the Godhead/Trinity possesses the entire essence of God, and that undivided.
- iv. Athanasian Creed: "The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits."
- v. Attempts to illustration the Trinity
 - 1. 3 phases of H₂O: Water, ice, steam
 - 2. 3-leaf clover
 - 3. 3 parts of an egg: yoke, white, shell
 - 4. The Shield of the Trinity
 - 5. Earliest known appearance was from Peter de Poitiers, a French theologian in the 12-13th centuries.
 - 6. To my knowledge, this is the best way to illustrate the Trinity.

- The Shield of the Trinity (not a way to visualize God!)



- vi. Westminster Confession of Faith (17th cent), 2:3

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost:⁶² the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;⁶³ the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.⁶⁴

e. Errors

- i. "The doctrine of the trinity was created during the patristic era by a church council."
- ii. Islam: Christians believe in the Trinity, which means three gods, Allah, Mary, and Jesus. This is something which no Christian has ever believed.

Surah 4:171-172 O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah [anything] but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not "Trinity" [some translate the Arabic as "three"] : desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son...

Surah 5:73 – They do blaspheme who say Allah is one of 3 in a Trinity, for there is no god except One God.

The Quran assumes that Trinitarians are polytheists, and, thus, have committed the sin of shirk (the unforgivable sin in Islam).

iii. “The doctrine of the Trinity is a logical contradiction. There cannot be one God and yet three distinct persons.”

- But, is the trinity a logical contradiction? Recall, what is a logical contradiction?
- The law of non-contradiction: A cannot be A and non-A at the same time and in the same relationship.
- But, are we saying that the Trinity is A and non-A at the same time and in the same relationship?
- We are saying God is one in essence but three in persons.
- In other words, God is 1 in A and 3 in B.
- If we said he has one in essence and three in essence, that would be a contradiction. Or one in person and three in persons.
- But we are saying that he is one in essence and three persons. Therefore, the Trinity is not a logical contradiction.